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Sheriff Reports Huge Savings Through Use of County Corrections Programs

By: Paul Garrod

Programs offered through the Van Buren Office of Community Corrections (OCC) have provided significant savings to county taxpayers, with four months left in the fiscal year. According to Van Buren County Sheriff Dale Gribler, to date, that savings has already translated to \$850,000.

"It's a cooperative effort between the courts, the prosecutor's office, public health, mental health, and the Van Buren County Board of Commissioners," said Gribler.

As many surrounding counties are experiencing jail overcrowding, Gribler said, "We just don't have that issue. Everyone is working together."

That partnership has developed into 12 different programs that are offered by the county's OCC. They include:

- *Weekend Work Crew

- *Tether

- *Intensive Supervision (work release)

- *New Directions

- *Cognitive Change

- *Jail Population Monitor

- *Community Service

- *Probation Residential Services

- *Drain Crew

- *Alternative Work Crew

- *One Church One Offender

- *Inmate Jail Workers.

According to Sgt. Shannon Evans, Van Buren County Sheriff's Office, Office of Community Corrections manager, the Weekend Work Crew is a community service program designed to take low-risk offenders to local non-profit and governmental agencies to perform community service, in lieu of serving jail or prison.

Three-quarters through its fiscal year, which begins in October, the Weekend Work Crew has accumulated county savings of \$91,354.50, completing 127 projects and working 5,686.5 hours.

To date, 221 participants have been involved in that program, with 154 successfully completing it. Currently, there are 19 active participants.

Another program, Intensive Supervision (work release) has experienced county savings of \$46,129.50.

To date, there have been 43 participants, with 34 successfully completing the program. Currently, there are five active participants.

This program allows more offenders to be placed on work release, allowing them to maintain employment while being incarcerated.

Through the New Directions program, county savings to date total \$177,462.90.

With 33 active participants, 13 have successfully completed the program, which targets offenders that are probation violators and "straddle cell" offenders.

The offender receives treatment from Van Buren District Mental Health Department for substance abuse issues, and is eligible for release to attend an out-patient New Directions group.

Through the Jail Population Monitor, designed to avoid overcrowding, Sgt. Evans screens offenders and places them into an alternative program that they may qualify for.

To date, through this program, county savings were reported at \$193,020.30.

A Community Service program, which started in May, has already experienced county savings of \$1,193.94.

The program's participants are supervised at a worksite, with the OCC reporting any violations to the appropriate court. The program is designed for individuals who are financially indigent, and also for state probation offenders who are sentenced to complete a required number of community service hours.

A Drain Crew, a jail-based work crew program, has also reported substantial county savings.

Through June, the program reported over \$29,200 in savings, completing 14 drains, with 22 successful participants. Drain Crew participants must complete a mile within six days.

The Alternative Work Crew program, another jail-based work crew program, enables eligible sentence offenders serving straight jail time, to earn up to one-quarter off their sentence.

The offenders are taken to local non-profit and governmental agencies, where they perform community service. To date, the county savings of \$28,184. 22 has been reported, with 25 successful participants.

Another similar program, Inmate Jail Workers, has experienced county savings to date, of just over \$179,000.

The program is offered to sentenced offenders to complete daily work crew tasks in exchange for 25 percent of their total jail sentence.

As an example, an inmate worker who receives a one-year sentence will receive a total of five months off their total jail time.

The Van Buren County Jail has 18 total inmate jail worker positions.